

Florida Association of District School Superintendents

White Paper on Implementation of Amendment Nine: Class Size Reduction

February 2003

In November 2002, Florida voters approved an amendment to Article IX, Section 1 of the Florida Constitution placing a maximum on class size by grade level. In approving the constitutional amendment, the people of Florida expressed their support for “a high quality education” for all public school students through smaller class sizes. The purpose of this white paper is to provide information and recommendations to the state policymakers in designing the implementation strategy for this constitutional amendment.

The Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) endorses the concept of adequate funding for a high quality education in our state. Due to the many variables that impact student performance, FADSS recognizes that research showing any gains due to class size reduction may be contested. However, with a sound implementation strategy, FADSS believes that the class size reduction (CSR) constitutional amendment can become an asset to school districts without bankrupting the state or lowering standards for educators or students. With these concepts in mind, this white paper is based upon the following guiding principles:

- ◆ Implementation of class size reduction (CSR) should be designed so that the recent gains in *student achievement* in Florida are not lost. In fact, funding of CSR should be designed to enhance those gains. To meet the requirements of CSR and the continued growth in student population, school districts will require additional revenue.
- ◆ Any and all implementation strategies of CSR must be *educationally sound*.
- ◆ In light of Florida’s diversity (urban/rural, large districts with 350,000 students and small districts with 1,500 students), CSR implementation strategies must be designed so that school districts have *maximum flexibility* to meet their unique needs.
- ◆ Since the constitutional amendment places the responsibility for funding CSR on the state, *adequate and equitable funding* for CSR implementation is critical and must be provided by the state so that school districts can meet the requirements of the constitutional amendment. Incentives and additional funding through the base student allocation are key components of this principle.
- ◆ Proper CSR implementation strategies should *maximize efficiency* in delivering quality educational programs to students.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

FADSS issued a position paper in opposition to the constitutional amendment in August 2002. Now however, the people of Florida have spoken and it is incumbent on FADSS to provide input to the state policymakers in designing an implementation strategy. FADSS researched the CSR issue thoroughly. The knowledge gained from that research and the involvement of statewide educational leaders in addressing the issues of CSR are included in this white paper.

The concept of class size reduction is not unique to Florida. Although Florida is the only state with a constitutional mandate for universal class size reduction in prekindergarten through 12th grade, Florida is one of more than 20 states undertaking some form of class size reduction. In fact, Florida had a legislative mandate for K-3 class size reduction for several years in the 1990's. The Florida Legislature provided \$100,000,000 per year for three fiscal years to achieve that legislative goal. Florida's current challenge is the comprehensive, universal nature of the constitutional amendment on CSR. However, Florida can take advantage of implementation errors and successes from the past and from other states in designing its CSR implementation strategy in 2003.

To date, focused CSR initiatives have been more effective than universal approaches according to research. For example, CSR efforts focused on low achieving schools or in the early grades have been more effective than the broad K-12 CSR efforts. That fact may be related to funding. Without a substantial reduction in class size, research has not been able to positively confirm the effects of CSR on student achievement. In short, CSR efforts must be substantial to have a measurable effect. However, many factors impact student achievement and these factors, including class size, interact with one another. That may explain why the research related to CSR efforts around the nation is the subject of much debate and why most states have chosen to focus their CSR efforts on lower grade levels only. Funding limitations as well as research have driven those decisions.

As indicated, CSR initiatives are expensive in terms of the construction of new facilities and the recruitment of qualified teachers. Florida is already facing a critical teacher shortage in some school districts and the state has had difficulty meeting the facility needs as a result of the typical annual student growth. Florida will gain about 67,000 new students in K-12 in 2003 and as a result will need more than 20,000 additional teachers. These new students and teachers require facilities. Although lack of facilities and qualified teachers are obvious deterrents to implementing CSR in Florida, improving the quality of new and existing teachers and the construction of efficient permanent facilities should remain primary state objectives. Otherwise, the additional state funds for CSR will not result in improved student achievement and will not meet the intent of the constitutional language.

Further, a large number of school districts in Florida have reduced class size in recent years, particularly in low performing schools. In these districts, educators have received lower salaries on the whole, so that limited funds could be used to hire additional personnel to reduce class size. It is imperative that state-level CSR efforts recognize CSR efforts in these districts by not allocating all additional funds to those districts that have chosen other actions instead of reducing class size.

It is extremely important to recognize Florida's diversity in designing the process for implementing CSR. Florida contains some of the most urbanized, culturally diverse districts in the nation as well as rural school districts as small as 1,500 students. A standardized "one size fits all" approach will have detrimental effects. Consequently, the centerpiece of the implementation plan should be the requirement that each school district develop its plan to achieve the CSR goals with specific timelines and costs identified. Districts that have not met their annual targets may be allowed to explain any circumstances that prevented their success. If some of these circumstances have a legal or regulatory basis, then districts should have an opportunity to apply for appropriate waivers.

Finally, as a result of the attention given to the class size initiative in the November election, school districts and the state must be proactive in addressing potential misconceptions to avoid a public backlash. The constitutional amendment provided an 8-year phase-in period. It is unclear how well the public understands this point. Therefore, a concerted effort at the state and district level is required so that the public is fully informed about steps being taken to implement CSR over time.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The November 2002 constitutional amendment on class size amended Article IX, Section 1 of the Florida Constitution. The amendment added the following statements to an existing paragraph in Article IX:

"To assure that children attending public schools obtain a high quality education, the legislature shall make adequate provision to ensure that, by the beginning of the 2010 school year, there are a sufficient number of classrooms so that:

- 1. The maximum number of students who are assigned to each teacher who is teaching in public school classrooms for prekindergarten through grade 3 does not exceed 18 students;**
- 2. The maximum number of students who are assigned to each teacher who is teaching in public school classrooms for grades 4 through 8 does not exceed 22 students; and**
- 3. The maximum number of students who are assigned to each teacher who is teaching public school classrooms for grades 9 through 12 does not exceed 25 students.**

The class size requirements of this subsection do not apply to extracurricular classes. Payment of the costs associated with reducing class size to meet these requirements is the responsibility of the state and not of local school districts. Beginning with the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the legislature shall provide sufficient funds to reduce the average number of students in each classroom

by at least two students per year until the maximum number of students per classroom does not exceed the requirement of this subsection.”

The constitutional amendment specifies a period of 8 years to achieve full implementation of the CSR maximums (2010) and requires the state to begin funding for class size reductions beginning in the fiscal year 2003-2004. The amendment language places the responsibility for funding the CSR initiative in Florida at the state level, not local school districts. However, without a new and dedicated source of state dollars, school districts can expect a reduction in funding to meet other student needs, such as health and safety programs, student discipline, counseling or curricular areas not covered by the amendment. School district superintendents and school boards have a fiduciary duty to taxpayers in their communities. Therefore, school districts have expressed an interest in collaborating with the state in developing the implementation strategy to increase both effectiveness and efficiency.

WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

Defining the terms in this constitutional language is the first order of business in developing a CSR implementation strategy. Even though it is not clearly stated, the use of “average number of students” in the last paragraph of the amendment implies a district-wide average of academic classes in the phase-in period of the amendment. Therefore, some academic classes may remain unchanged while the school district invests limited funds in targeted classrooms to reduce the overall district average. Since the amendment specifies maximum class sizes by grade levels, the district averages should be based upon student to teacher ratios in K-grade 3, grades 4-8 and grades 9-12. Without an interpretation of this nature, districts that have invested additional funds to lower class sizes in poor performing schools in the past might be required to increase those class sizes to meet the constitutional requirements of the amendment. In order to reach the ultimate goal of CSR and in light of the first sentence of the amendment, this approach does not appear to be the intent of the amendment. Using these grade level groupings is also consistent with the reporting requirements of the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP).

Further, “extracurricular” is usually defined as after-school activities in common education parlance, such as marching band or athletic competitions. In the context of the amendment, it appears to mean classes that are not part of the core academic program – mathematics, language arts/reading, science, social studies, foreign languages, exceptional education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the traditional self-contained (core) elementary school classroom. (The self-contained core classrooms in elementary schools provide instruction in the core curriculum areas listed above.) The constitutional requirement does **not** appear to apply to health, physical education, career/vocational education nor the arts. Therefore, the CSR requirements should apply only to the core academic courses.

It should be noted that by including ESE and ESOL in the calculations of class size averages, it is extremely important to recognize the federal requirements regarding supplementing and supplanting. In other words, increasing class sizes in federally funded programs in order to hire additional teachers in other curriculum areas is not an acceptable approach since supplanting federal funds will result in the state’s loss of these funds.

It should be noted further that Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and dual enrollment are highly specialized programs and should be excluded from the class size average calculations. Because of their design, limiting class sizes in these programs will merely decrease the availability of these programs to students. That does not appear to be in keeping with the intent of the CSR amendment.

Also, the amendment language does not address the issue of timing. In other words, it does not state when the district averages are to be calculated. Since a large percentage of district funds are invested in instructional and school-based personnel, many districts do not hire additional staff to meet growth needs until the students physically appear in the classroom in the fall. In that way, they do not mistakenly hire too many teachers, a process that has major budget implications. Therefore, for the sake of district financial stability and the stability of student assignments, it is reasonable to calculate the district averages during the October FTE reporting period and identify specific classes in the districts that are out of compliance. School districts should then be allowed to make adjustments through the first semester and be required to meet the CSR requirements by the February FTE reporting period. By so doing, school districts will not be required to constantly move students from teacher to teacher at the beginning of the year to meet the constitutional mandates. Again, in light of the first sentence of the amendment, it does not appear that continuous student transfers or unstable budgeting practices were the intent of the constitutional amendment.

In the academic arena, the language of the amendment does not address the issue of specialized classroom teachers, such as reading coaches, math specialists and writing specialists that are used by almost every Florida school district in 2002-2003. For example, if some students in a regular class are assigned to a reading coach for a portion of the day for intensive reading instruction, the reading teachers must be counted as a part of the average district class size in the phase-in stage of the amendment. Otherwise, school districts will not be able to utilize the services of specially trained teachers such as reading coach to meet the needs of selected students. These specialized teachers are expertly trained classroom teachers who instruct selected students in reading, mathematics or writing in small group settings for a portion of the day or provide specific training to classroom teachers with these students in their classes. Therefore, having four regular classroom teachers and a specially trained reading coach is not academically equivalent to five regular classroom teachers. The working assumption that these specialized teachers such as reading coaches be calculated as a part of the district average class size is critical to the achievement of the "high quality education" stipulated in the first sentence of the amendment.

The same logic used with these specialized teachers must also be applied to districts that utilize a co-teaching model. For the purposes of these definitions, the students in programs with co-teachers must consider both teachers in calculating the district average. The teacher to student ratio is what the constitutional amendment addresses.

Regarding facilities, although school districts may initially utilize non-conventional spaces for classrooms, permanent utilization of these spaces or huge district investments of facility funds into the lease or purchase of relocatable classrooms is not in keeping with the intent of this

amendment. Initially, school districts will need flexibility in the use of space to meet the CSR requirements while permanent facilities are being constructed. However, this temporary situation is no substitute for a permanent solution to the facility requirements of CSR and Florida's annual growth in student population. Otherwise, the "high quality education" stated in the first sentence of the amendment will not be met. By the same token, the newly legislated compliance requirements for portable or modular classrooms currently located on school grounds needs to continue to be delayed until school districts have time to construct permanent facilities. Otherwise, large expenditures of facility funds will be used on buildings with limited life-spans.

Finally, the constitutional amendment appears to exclude some actions by the state. For example, it would appear to **exclude the use of vouchers to private schools or requiring multi-track year-round schedules as a means of achieving the mandates of the amendment.** By locating the amendment under Section 1 of Article IX, the mandates are related to adequate funding for public schools to achieve the mandates of the amendment. Further, the first sentence of the amendment appears to exclude scheduling techniques such as multi-track year round schools or publicly increasing the funds at private schools to meet the requirements. Strategies such as these appear to thwart the will of the people expressed through their support of the amendment. The amendment clearly states that increased funding is designed to "assure that children attending public schools obtain a high quality education" and that the "legislature shall make adequate provision" of funds to make that happen. Therefore, the use of vouchers in any form appears to be contrary to the language and intent of the CSR amendment.

CURRICULUM ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The safety, welfare and academic achievement of students are the foremost concerns of these recommendations. The first two guiding principles in the construction of this white paper are gains in **student achievement** and implementation strategies that are **educationally sound**. The following recommendations are offered with these guiding principles as the focus:

- ◆ **Allow each district to develop an individualized plan, including needed waivers of state laws and regulations. The plan should allow flexibility in the district's allocation of resources to improve cost-effectiveness.**

Rationale: Florida is an extremely diverse state. Imposing a single approach to implementing class size reductions will create equity issues and ignore the fact that the needs of students in the various districts will differ. Without maximum flexibility, districts will not be able to use limited resources in the areas of greatest student need. For example, some districts may be able to extend the student day and offer increased salaries to teachers while others may need to expend funds hiring additional teachers and staff to open new schools. Since locally elected officials (the school board) are held accountable for these types of decisions by the electorate in their communities, school districts should be given maximum latitude in designing their CSR implementation strategies.

- ◆ **The CSR implementation strategy should allow a waiver and appeal process for districts.**

Rationale: There may be unanticipated and unintended consequences related to decisions made at the state and local levels in implementing CSR. Districts should be given a process by which they explain these extraordinary circumstances and identify strategies to address these circumstances without penalty.

- ◆ **The Legislature should appoint a statewide committee to identify specialized core academic courses which, by their intended design and purpose, need to be excluded from the class size calculations; for example, specific Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses.**

Rationale: The committee could assist the Legislature in identifying all courses that fit these criteria and that traditionally have higher or lower than normal student enrollment. Otherwise, implementation of CSR may have the unintended consequence of decreasing student opportunities to enroll in these advanced, specialized courses.

- ◆ **Ensure that available research is used to support any state mandates designed to implement CSR.**

Rationale: Extensive research is available about other state efforts to implement CSR. Further, numerous initiatives, such as multi-track year round schools, have been attempted in some Florida school districts over the last two decades. Many of these initiatives were found to be unduly disruptive to families and communities, and were not cost effective. With these experiences in mind, state strategies to implement CSR should not force districts to repeat mistakes of the past or the mistakes of others.

- ◆ **Calculations of average class sizes should be based upon district averages in grades kindergarten through grade 3, grades 4-8 and grades 9-12 in mathematics, language arts/reading, science, social studies, foreign languages, exceptional student education (ESE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the self-contained (core) elementary classroom.**

Rationale: This approach is consistent with the language of the constitutional amendment and will offer some degree of flexibility for school districts to meet the specific needs of their students.

- ◆ **Adjust class sizes at a time least disruptive to the instructional programs in each school district by reporting the preliminary class sizes in October and the final count in February for those districts out of compliance.**

Rationale: It is in the best interest of students and teachers to make adjustments to class size as early in the school year as possible. However, in light of the magnitude of this amendment, there will be situations in which qualified personnel are not available or appropriate space for another class is not available and so forth. Therefore, the October

reporting period should be used to determine where problems may exist and school districts should then be given until February of the same school year to correct those problems. That would mean that only those districts with unresolved issues would report in February.

- ◆ **Ensure that programs/courses outside of the CSR amendment and specialized instructional spaces (e.g., science laboratories, media centers, performing art rooms, and so forth) are not harmed or sacrificed in order to meet the requirements of CSR.**

Rationale: Special programs are designed to meet the individual needs of students and to prepare students for work, college and citizenship. Eliminating or overloading these programs and courses would not be educationally sound for students. By the same token, programs, not square footage, should determine the best utilization of space at a school site.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF PERSONNEL ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prior to the passage of the CSR amendment, Florida was expected to need over 100,000 new teachers in the next ten years to address normal growth in student population and to replace an aging work force in schools. As was reported at a presentation before the Senate Select Committee on Constitutional Amendment Implementation, the CSR amendment will exacerbate Florida's continuing need to hire more teachers. The Department of Education estimates that Florida will need to hire 20,000 teachers in 2003-04 due to attrition and enrollment growth. Class Size reduction will dictate a need to hire an additional 7,000 teachers in 2003-04. This represents a total of 27,000 new hires for 2003-04 while Florida's colleges and universities, both public and private, will provide 4,700 graduates who are new to teaching. The estimated combined effects of enrollment growth, class size reduction, and attrition will require that 91,000 new teachers will be needed over the next 4 years, or 68% of the current workforce.

Clearly, barriers to recruiting and retaining teachers should be eliminated or reduced to meet the requirements of the CSR amendment. Below is a menu of teacher recruitment and retention strategies that have been explored by FADSS over the last few years and reviewed in light of the passage of the CSR amendment.

Funding Strategies

While compensation is not the only reason teachers leave the profession or individuals are not attracted to the teaching profession, it is a major consideration. Below are strategies that could increase teacher compensation and positively impact student performance.

- ◆ Fund a minimum \$3,000 annual salary increase above inflation and cost of living increases for each Florida educator by expanding the school year by ten days (five days for instruction and five days for professional development). This could be phased in over a five-year period.
- ◆ Provide funds to lengthen the school day by one hour at the secondary (middle and high school) level. This could promote differentiated staffing and compensation. Some teachers may want to teach a more traditional day, while others could teach an additional hour.
- ◆ Provide funds to increase salaries for teachers teaching in critical shortage areas (math, science, foreign language, exceptional student education, etc.) Provide some flexibility on the local level to respond to specific shortages.
- ◆ Provide funds to increase salaries for outstanding teachers in low performing schools.
- ◆ Continue the Dale Hickam Excellent Teaching Program. Modify the program to allow teachers to continue earning supplements after 10 years after satisfying certain criteria.
- ◆ Establish a 5th & 10th Year Teacher Bonus Program designed to reward teachers who renew their teaching certificate for the first time and received satisfactory performance evaluations.
- ◆ Provide financial support for career ladders in districts; particularly for paraprofessionals to advance. Expand teacher preparation programs by utilizing community colleges and private universities.

Additional Compensation Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- ◆ Provide housing purchase assistance.
- ◆ Provide special property tax exemptions.

Tuition Reimbursement

- ◆ Expand the current Critical Shortage Loan Forgiveness Program to include all teachers.
- ◆ Create a Tuition Reimbursement Program for Teachers Teaching Out-of-Field to obtain appropriate certification coverage to be considered teaching in field.

Expanded Retirement Options

- ◆ Provide for full reemployment after DROP and retirement.
- ◆ Extend DROP participation from 60 to 96 months.

Modify Certification Requirements

Any certification barriers should be removed without sacrificing quality. In addition, compliance with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) must be ensured.

- ◆ Speed up the issuance of teacher certification eligibility letters.
- ◆ Streamline certification for out-of-state teachers – provide full reciprocity with satisfactory performance.
- ◆ Streamline certification for individuals who have a bachelor's degree and indicate an interest in teaching.
- ◆ Allow districts to issue five-year adjunct certification to individuals with a Bachelor's degree who will be teaching for half time or less.

Expand Mentoring and Professional Development Opportunities

Beginning teachers, in particular, should participate in mentoring programs or teaching arrangements that foster professional growth and increase strategies for improving student performance. In addition, professional development must be increased for all teachers as a recruitment and retention strategy.

- ◆ Introduce or expand co-teaching arrangements to increase mentoring opportunities and address CSR implementation.
- ◆ Establish teacher peer assistance and mentoring programs to support new and struggling teachers.
- ◆ Require a yearlong residency program for first year teachers to team with a mentor teacher.
- ◆ Increase state allocation of professional development dollars to districts to accommodate the increase in teachers requiring training as a result of the CSR amendment.

Reappointment Deadlines

In the first few years of CSR implementation, reappointment deadlines may need to be waived or modified to lengthen recruitment efforts in districts.

FACILITIES ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the guiding principle related to equity, the allocation of capital funds for CSR should not penalize districts that have been proactive in the planning and construction of schools. For example, districts that have successfully passed ½-cent sales tax referendums and implemented

impact fees to meet growth and renovation needs should get an equitable share of any construction funds for k-12 schools. Therefore, funding for future school construction should be allocated based upon unweighted FTE.

Further, the recommendations listed below do not address actions that are considered outside of the intent of the CSR amendment. For example, the use of vouchers to send students and public funds to private schools, state mandated double sessions, and state restrictions on scheduling (such as year round schools) were considered by FADSS committees and found to be outside of the intent of the CSR amendment.

- ◆ **Ensure that all FISH/S-REF capacity requirements are consistent with the constitutionally established class maximums.**

Rationale: The square footage requirements for schools in the past assumed a specific class size by grade level. These requirements need to give rapidly growing districts the flexibility to modify these requirements to reflect the new constitutional maximums. In that way, schools can be built more economically and meet the requirements of the CSR amendment.

- ◆ **Repeal all statutory references to “small school” requirements**

Rationale: State mandates restricting school size in any way increase the costs of construction per student and/or the costs of operation. In tight budget years, these restrictions are not appropriate. Elected local officials are held accountable by the electorate for decisions related to school size and location. Additional state regulations hinder school district construction programs and does not recognize the accountable of locally elected officials.

- ◆ **Repeal or roll back statutory deadlines for the required modification of existing relocatable classrooms.**

Rationale: It is the goal of school districts to decrease reliance on relocatable classrooms. However, school districts have been forced to spend precious construction and renovation funds on the upgrade of older relocatable classrooms to meet new state requirements. These funds could be spent more cost-effectively in renovating permanent structures or constructing permanent structures to replace the relocatables. In light of the budget situation in fiscal year 2003-04, this repeal or continued delay in implementation is essential.

- ◆ **Eliminate statutory restrictions on the purchase and/or lease of relocatable classrooms.**

Rationale: In high growth districts, school systems have been forced to rely upon relocatable classrooms to house students. The rate of student growth is greater than funding can construct new schools. Unfortunately, the CSR amendment will exacerbate this issue and make it necessary for some districts to purchase even larger numbers of

relocatables. Restrictions on the purchase or lease of these relocatables will force school districts to use double-sessions and other educationally unsound practices to house students safely.

- ◆ **Explore the possibility of utilizing non-traditional spaces such as shopping malls and office buildings, where available, to offer a small number of elementary self-contained classrooms, which would require further deregulation of state requirements related to FISH/S-REF.**

Rationale: Due to the extreme need for suitable space to house students in some rapidly growing school districts, districts should be allowed to apply to the state to waive traditional facility requirements so that they can offer kindergarten and first grade classes in non-traditional locations that districts could rent or lease.

ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE FUNDING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Perhaps the most difficult portion of the CSR amendment is the state's allocation of adequate and equitable funds to finance the costs associated with the amendment. The financial recommendations are predicated upon the five guiding principles enumerated in the opening pages of this document.

Financial proposals at the state level should also ensure that funding is adequate to cover the full and true cost of the amendment. In the past, funding proposals have carried hidden costs to school districts without available state funding. It is important to avoid these hidden costs in all new proposals for funding.

Further, proposals should ensure the equitable distribution of new state money provided to finance the operating and capital outlay costs. Proposals should also provide local constitutional officers with maximum flexibility and minimum administrative burden when using new state money to pay for this requirement. Maximum flexibility is the only way to increase efficiencies and allow school districts to respond to their needs for personnel and facilities as rapidly as possible. Additional reports and forms that require district time and effort are not needed. In light of the five guiding principles and these caveats, the following recommendations are offered:

- ◆ **Finance methods to implement the constitutional requirements of this amendment should use the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) as the method to fund the amendment.**

Rationale: The FEFP has been found by both court decisions and legislatively supported studies to be a finance plan that is both equitable and efficient. As such, it provides the best and most equitable method to distribute the new state funds for the CSR program.

- ◆ **Methods to establish the operating budget impact of this amendment should fairly consider the realities of the marketplace and of other aspects of the Florida School Code.**

Rationale: It is well established that school districts were already facing a shortage of teachers because of growth, retirements, and attrition among educators. The amendment will increase the demand for educators without increasing factors that will increase supply. State colleges and universities do not produce enough educators to meet present or projected demand.

The decrease in class size will increase the operating overhead required to support each educator. For example, the utility costs for each educator will be higher as more educators meet with fewer students in more classrooms. The cost of classroom sets of teaching materials will also increase. This increase in overhead must be determined and included in the cost for each teacher unit, not just the new teacher units to ensure that the funding for this amendment addresses the principles of adequate funding to meet the amendment requirements while protecting the resources to maintain student achievement as the highest value.

- ◆ **The cumulative costs of implementing the amendment that was documented by the Governor's staff during the campaign must be reflected in the financial implementation of the amendment within the FEFP.**

Rationale: Each year the previous appropriations for implementing the class size amendment will have to be retained and additional dollars will have to be added to the appropriation to reflect both the new costs and the continuing costs of the amendment.

- ◆ **The amount of training dollars per student, or the basis for the formula should be adjusted to provide the funds that will be required to ensure highly qualified educators will be developed among non-traditional applicants.**

Rationale: The increased demand for educators may lead districts to hire more educators who lack the background and training to work with students. To maintain recent student achievement gains, increased staff development efforts across districts will be critical.

- ◆ **The costs of the amendment should be provided by an appropriate increase in the Base Student Allocation (BSA).**

Rationale: If the BSA is used as the method for funding the amendment, the new state funds will be allocated through the formula. This will ensure equitable funding by making full use of the equity aspects of the FEFP. Stipulations written into budget proviso language can identify the new state funds provided for the amendment and direct districts to use the identified portion of the new state funds to reduce class sizes by the constitutionally mandated and statutorily determined amount.

If it is determined that a categorical appropriation within the FEFP is the legally necessary or legislatively desirable method to provide funds for the amendment, then the equity principles incorporated into the formula, and the adequacy considerations elaborated above should be applied to the categorical.

- ◆ **When determining the funding required to support the amendment, the following relevant considerations should be explicitly stated in legislation or in the budget:**
 - **The added cost of reduced class size must be included when projecting student growth in districts experiencing such growth.**
 - **The entitlement of students receiving Opportunity Scholarships, and McKay Scholarships must be determined and specific funding provided to these students if it is determined that they are affected by the amendment.**

Rationale: Since the amendment specifies “public school classes” it would seem that these programs are not constitutionally covered.

- ◆ **The immediate impact of reduced class size upon federal funding must be determined. If federal funds used to reduce class size must be replaced by new state dollars because of supplanting issues, this must be considered either in the amount of money provided or in the determination of the baseline average class size from which districts must make reductions. All budget recommendations should adhere to the federal requirements that specialized federal funds (e.g., Title I, Title VI, IDEA, etc.) be used to supplement, not supplant dollars for class size reduction.**

Rationale: State amendments cannot conflict with the intent and requirements of federal laws.

- ◆ **The funding mechanism should reward districts that use creative and efficient methods to implement the amendment.**

Rationale: If reward methods cannot be developed, then the funding mechanism should not penalize districts that have already implemented class size reductions or that find efficient methods to meet the required average class size requirements during the implementation.

- ◆ **Develop criteria for allocating funds equitably across the state.**

Rationale: Since districts are at different points in meeting the requirements of the amendment, districts should be given a sufficient increase in unweighted FTE dollars (which includes growth) that is equivalent to the cost of reducing class size by two students per year. Districts should be given flexibility in the use of these new FTE dollars to accommodate individual district needs.

- ◆ **Distribute CSR funds based on student membership data to ensure that districts are not penalized for past decisions regarding teacher salaries, size, and other factors.**

Rationale: It is important for districts to have a level playing field for implementation of the amendment. Some districts are already close to the maximum class sizes specified in the amendment and have done so through reduced personnel costs. It is important that all districts are treated equitably in the allocation of state funds for education.

- ◆ **It is recommended that compliance with the implementation requirements be determined by calculating the average district class sizes (student to teacher ratios) in the three grade levels K- Grade 3, grades 4-8, and grades 9-12.**

Rationale: In order to determine if class sizes have decreased by 2 students in 2003-04 school year, the average district class sizes for the three different grade levels should be recorded for the 2002-2003 school year. This calculation should be used as the baseline for determining the reduction in class size by two required for 2003-2004 and subsequent years of the implementation phase of the amendment.

- ◆ **It is recommended that compliance be determined in conjunction with data collected during the second FEFP survey period (October FTE count). However, those districts that have not met the 2 student per class reduction in that fiscal year will be given technical assistance by the Department of Education and required to make necessary adjustments by the February FTE reporting period.**

Rationale: If an additional data element is required to ensure a consolidated data collection period, that determination should be made early enough to ensure that district data bases can be modified in a timely way. If a district is determined to be out of compliance, data can be collected during the third FTE survey period. Districts determined to be in compliance during the second calculation should not be reviewed again during the school year. This approach will reduce the administrative burden on the school districts and allow the Department to focus on those districts in need of assistance during the school year.

The implementing legislation or the budget should not establish burdensome requirements to repeatedly report class size during the school year or to engage in other detailed audit-driven requirements that add administrative costs or burdens. It is understood that on a practical basis in the thousands of classrooms around the state there are daily variations in enrollment. It is exactly this type of reality that was considered when FADSS supported the Governor's opposition to this amendment. The district accountability requirements for this and any other requirement should be simple and performance driven to avoid the expenditure of limited resources for audit-driven administrative functions rather than for activities that support student achievement.

- ◆ **Establish an accountability process for reviewing and assessing the accuracy, equity, adequacy, and impact of the calculations, funding formulas and procedures outlined in the implementation of the Class Size Reduction Amendment.**

Rationale: This process will provide recommendations for modifications, if necessary.

NOTES:

Although FADSS does not recommend changes in the FEFP at this time, FADSS recognizes that underfunding the formula is driving the need to find alternatives to the FEFP. With that thought in mind, FADSS recommends that the Legislature consider the following:

- a. Districts should be required to levy both the 0.51 mills and 0.25 mills to qualify for declining enrollment funds, sparsity, or compression funding, if available.
- b. Districts should be allowed to use funds out of the 2.0 mills capital outlay to pay property insurance. If a district is already levying 2.0 mills now, that district can increase above 2.0 mills to cover the increased cost of property insurance that is projected to be over \$100 million in 2003-04.
- c. The Legislature should provide a funding floor for school districts levying .51 mills for operation. This funding floor will adjust districts that are receiving less than \$100 per student in comparison to others receiving \$450 or more per student. As an equity issue, this equalization should begin with a minimum of \$150 per student and adjusted in future years.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School districts and the state must be proactive in addressing a public misconception that all classes will be reduced to 18, 22 and 25 students by September 2003. Since the constitutional amendment provided an 8-year phase-in period, a concerted effort at the state and district level is essential in avoiding public misunderstanding and frustration. In that regard, the following recommendations are made:

- ◆ **The Florida Department of Education and local school districts should disseminate accurate, up-to-date information regarding progress toward class size reduction through every communication channel available.**

Rationale: A conflict exists between perception and reality regarding the ultimate outcome of class size reduction. In some parts of the state, there is a public perception that school districts will reduce class sizes immediately to meet the maximums specified in the amendment. These expectations can lead to frustration and anger toward state level and district level policy makers. To avoid public backlash, accurate information

regarding the requirements of the amendment is needed prior to the beginning of the next school year.

- ◆ **The Florida Department of Education should establish a state-wide “point of contact” for information about school district progress toward class size reduction.**

Rationale: It is important to have a single source of information to avoid the possibility of misinformation or misinterpretations of data.

- ◆ **The Florida Department of Education should begin a public communication campaign to explain the relationship between class size and salaries of employees.**

Rationale: A clear correlation exists between teacher salaries and class size. In those districts with the highest class size, teacher salaries are the highest. It is important for the public to understand this correlation clearly so that they will understand decisions that the Governor, Legislature and local school districts will need to make to implement CSR.

SUMMARY

Even though the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) opposed Amendment 9, FADSS endorses the concept of adequate funding for a high quality education in our state. In implementing the will of the people regarding class size reduction (CSR), the recommendations listed above are based upon five (5) principles which places the needs of students at the top of the list. Further, with the diversity of our state, a one-size-fits-all approach will be the least cost-effective. Therefore, all implementation strategies suggested above are based upon maximum flexibility at the school district level and adequate, equitable funding.

Although terms and working assumptions were defined in great detail, it is safe to assume that some definitions or concepts were omitted. Some unintended consequences may occur in the first year of implementation. Therefore, it is important to establish committees to monitor the implementation process and report findings or recommendations to state level decision-makers in subsequent legislative sessions.

Numerous curriculum issues were identified. Foremost among these was the method used to calculate class size. It is critical that the language of the constitutional amendment be used to identify these classes. However, it is clear that the amendment was not intended to deny student access to particular advanced programs such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB). Therefore, one of the study committees mentioned above should identify curriculum areas that need further study or specific action at the state level. This review may require certain waiver or appeals to address extraordinary circumstances in school districts. In the final analysis, research and experience with past programs should be used to support any state mandates designed to implement CSR.

One of the biggest obstacles to the successful implementation of CSR in Florida is the employment of qualified teachers and administrators. In light of the large number of anticipated

educator retirements in 2003 and 2004, coupled with sustained growth in student populations, class size reduction efforts will exacerbate an already critical shortage of educators in Florida. The easy response is to lower standards for teachers and administrators. However, to do so would jeopardize the achievement gains of students in the last few years. Instead, recommendations were made to attract and retain qualified educators in our state. It should be noted that many of these recommendations are identical to those proposed by FADSS in 2001, with a few additions.

A second major obstacle facing school districts is adequate space for classrooms. Some districts will need a massive construction effort to meet their CSR goals. Others will need renovations or replacements for relocatable classrooms. In order to maximize capital outlay dollars, it is imperative that the state remove as many restrictions as possible related to the construction and renovation of schools. The current process is time consuming from the date of purchasing property for a new school to the date that students can actually move into the school. Every effort should be made to reduce the amount of time required for districts to respond to construction needs.

The CSR amendment places responsibility for funding on the Legislature. In light of the current budget condition of the state, this massive funding requirement will be extremely difficult for state policy makers. There are numerous approaches to allocating CSR funds to school districts. The recommended approach for doing so would utilize the current FEFP formula. The FEFP is a national model of funding equity that has been tested in the courts. If a categorical approach is used, these categorical funds should flow through the FEFP formula to ensure equity. (An example of a large categorical that flows through the FEFP formula is the instructional materials categorical.) Not only must the formula used to fund CSR be adequate, it must also be equitable.

Finally, to avoid confusion and public frustration, a state wide communications campaign should be established. It is important for the public to have accurate and timely information regarding efforts to reduce class size. This proactive approach will reduce the necessity of public appeals to policy makers and challenges through the judicial system based upon inaccurate information.